

Accepted Manuscript

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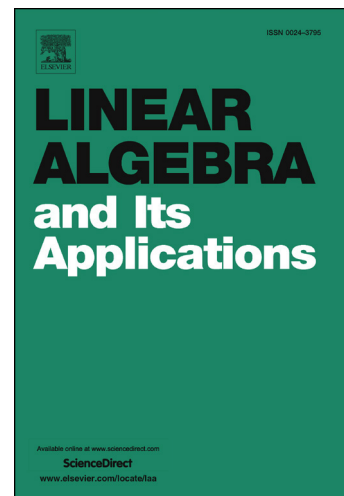
PII: S0024-3795(17)30330-0
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.laa.2017.05.030>
Reference: LAA 14178

To appear in: *Linear Algebra and its Applications*

Received date: 14 January 2017
Accepted date: 15 May 2017

Please cite this article in press as: D.K. Bukovšek, M. Omladič, Linear spaces of symmetric nilpotent matrices, *Linear Algebra Appl.* (2017), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.laa.2017.05.030>

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Linear spaces of symmetric nilpotent matrices

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Abstract

In 1958 Gerstenhaber showed that if \mathcal{L} is a subspace of the vector space of the square matrices of order n over some field \mathbb{F} , consisting of nilpotent matrices, and the field \mathbb{F} is sufficiently large, then the maximal dimension of \mathcal{L} is $\frac{n(n-1)}{2}$, and if this dimension is attained, then the space \mathcal{L} is triangularizable. Linear spaces of symmetric matrices seem to be first studied by Meshulam in 1989 in view of the bound of their rank. Although it seems unnatural to ask when a linear space of symmetric matrices is made of nilpotents and when it is triangular, we find a way to do so by going to an equivalent notion for symmetric matrices, i.e. persymmetric matrices. We develop a theory that enables us to prove extensions of some beautiful classical triangularizability results to the case of symmetric matrices. Not only the Gerstenhaber's result, but also Engel, Jacobson and Radjavi theorems can be extended. We also study maximal linear spaces of symmetric nilpotents of smaller dimension.

Keywords: symmetric and persymmetric matrices, nilpotent matrices, maximal linear space of matrices, triangularizability

2000 MSC: 15A30, 15B99

1. Introduction

Linear spaces of matrices with some additional properties have attracted much attention from the mathematical community in the last fifty years or so. One of the oldest problems in the area is the question of a linear space of matrices of bounded rank. This is a question that can be posed for general rectangular matrices, i.e. for subspaces of $M_{n,p}(\mathbb{F})$ (the set of all n -by- p matrices with entries in \mathbb{F}), where \mathbb{F} is a general field. The basic theorem is the one of Flanders [7], which states that if a linear subspace \mathcal{L} of $M_{n,p}(\mathbb{F})$ has the maximal possible rank less than or equal to r , with $r \leq p \leq n$, then $\dim \mathcal{L} \leq nr$ (with some modest limitations on the field). He also gives the form of the space if the bound is attained. By perfecting Flanders's techniques, Atkinson, Lloyd and somewhat later Beasley

^{*}The authors acknowledge the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P1-0222).

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